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Housekeepers' Chat

Friday, November 21, 1930

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Choosing the turkey, Information from the Bureaus of
Agricultural Economics and Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: Radio cook book.

"Over the river and through the woods,
To Grandmother's house we go;
The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh
O'er the white and drifting snow."

You all know the poem, I'm sure- a picture of a real old-fashioned Thanksgiving. It used to be in all our school readers. But alas, this genial sort of family holiday gathering is not common nowadays, for one reason and another. Members of the family are much more widely scattered. The old farm home may no longer be in existence. Even turkeys aren't the novelty they once were, when grandmother raised her own. And as for the horse that knew "the way to carry the sleigh", - he's been supplanted for some time by the family car. The chances are that grandmother and grandfather, and Aunt Mary and Uncle John, and other relatives within driving distance, will come into town for their Thanksgiving dinner at the home of one of the younger housekeepers in the family.

Perhaps the very last bride in the family will be the one to give the big dinner this year. She's very modern and intelligent, but if it's the first time she has selected and cooked a turkey, there are some things she'll need to know. So I'm going to pass along, for her benefit, what I have found out from various experts in the Department of Agriculture. You know we have experts on how to raise turkeys, and other experts on marketing them, and a special service that grades the royal birds, and finally our friends in the Bureau of Home Economics to tell us how to cook them. So even a bride can't go far wrong, with so much help.

In a great many States turkeys are graded by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. A tag is attached to the leg of the bird, stating whether it is "prime", "choice", or "medium". If you see one of these tags showing that a turkey has been government graded, you may buy it with confidence. The principal difference in the grades is the amount of fleshing of the bird.

Turkeys over a year old are also marked "mature".

But perhaps where you live there are no graded turkeys on the market. Very well, then. You must make your own selection as best you can. Look first at the amount and quality of flesh, especially on the breast, back, and hips. Plenty of flesh means plenty of meat for carving. There should also be a generous amount of fat, to insure a tender, moist, turkey.

The age of a turkey is distinguished, as with other poultry, by the flexibility of the tip of the breast bone. Of course you expect it to bend easily in young birds. Almost any turkey may be cooked so that it is tender, but a young bird is generally more juicy than an old one, and does not require such long, slow cooking. A good turkey should also be well-bled, well-dressed, and free from pin feathers. There should be no flesh bruises, and just as few breaks in the skin as possible.

"How large a turkey should I buy?" I hear someone asking.

That, depends, in a measure, on how many people are coming to your Thanksgiving dinner. A nine or ten-pound bird is a good choice for a dinner where there are six or eight at table. I, for one, like cold turkey as well as hot roast turkey. I want leftovers when I cook my Thanksgiving dinner- to say nothing of a final meal of turkey hash when there are no more slicing pieces, and turkey soup--- But, as Kipling says- that's another story. I shall certainly get a turkey that's big enough to take care of the possible unexpected guest, and still provide some cold meat.

Even with Thanksgiving dinner so close at hand, we housekeepers must remember that every day has to have its menus planned, - and act accordingly. Now, what shall we have for Saturday night? Something tasty for this nippy weather, - something not too expensive, something easy to prepare.

How about an oxtail stew? I'm surprised to find how many people have never tried this fine-flavored meat, either for soup or stew. There is considerable gelatinous tissue clinging to the meat, and this makes a delicious soup stock, or gravy. Oxtails are generally cheap, and are very reasonable during the cold months.

I must warn you that it takes slow cooking to make oxtails tender, but the result is worth the long simmering. Whether you want to make soup or stew, you must first cook the meat in this way. For soup, add more water as the liquid cooks down. For stew, thicken the liquid remaining when the meat is done, to make gravy.

You'll find a recipe for oxtail stew in the radio cookbook, but perhaps I'd better read it to you also. Will you take it down now? Twelve items to check:

OX-TAIL STEW

1 ox tail	1 large potato, diced
2 onions, sliced	Salt and pepper to taste
2 tablespoons butter or other fat	1 teaspoon savory sauce

1-1/2 quarts water
4 carrots, diced
2 turnips, diced

Flour
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
Slices of lemon

(Repeat the ingredients, 12 in all)

Disjoint the ox tail into short lengths. Wash, wipe dry, and brown in its own fat. Cook the onions in the butter, add to the meat with the water, and simmer until the meat is almost tender. Add the carrots, turnips, and potato, and cook until the vegetables are soft. Then add the salt, pepper, and savory sauce. Thicken the stew with a small quantity of flour, mixed with a little cold water to a smooth paste, and cook for a few minutes longer. Sprinkle with the parsley, and lay slices of lemon on top.

Besides oxtail stew, and the vegetables it contains, I suggest for the dinner menu, toasted rolls, grapefruit salad, and a chocolate custard.

I know what you'll be wanting me to talk about next week: Thanksgiving dinner, from soup to nuts. Yes, I have a menu for you, and will tell you how to cook the turkey. On Monday we'll get the dessert off our minds- Pumpkin pie, of course, And other kinds of pie you may want to know about, too.

Monday, November 24- Pumpkin and Other Kinds of Pie.

